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Public Perception of CSR Programs and Their Influence on Trust and Corporate Image of PT. Gorontalo Listrik Perdana Tanjung Karang

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Abstract

The increasing public demand for corporate social responsibility has emphasized the importance of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a strategic instrument for building harmonious relationships between companies and communities. PT. Gorontalo Listrik Perdana Tanjung Karang, an energy provider in North Gorontalo, also faces the need to strengthen public perception, increase trust, and improve its image through various CSR programs. However, there is no comprehensive picture of how the public interprets CSR implementation and its impact on trust and corporate image. This study aims to analyze public perceptions of CSR programs and examine the social construction of trust and corporate image formed through these activities. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis, then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model. The results show that CSR is positively assessed when programs are aligned with community needs, implemented consistently, and accompanied by open communication. Relevant and sustainable CSR has been shown to strengthen public trust and contribute to improving corporate image. However, several challenges arise related to the uneven distribution of benefits, lack of socialization, and limited community involvement. This study confirms that the success of CSR is largely determined by public participation, transparency, and program sustainability, so companies need to design CSR strategies that are more inclusive and responsive to the local context.

Keywords: CSR; public perception; trust; corporate image; Gorontalo

Introduction

The background to this research stems from the significant transformation of the role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the contemporary era. While CSR was often viewed as merely philanthropy or a company's social contribution to society, regulatory developments and public expectations have now made it a strategic component of business models. In Indonesia, CSR has become increasingly crucial as public attention grows on the social and environmental impacts of corporate activities. Some observers have highlighted that without transparency and long-term commitment, CSR could lose its meaning (Wild & Wild, 2025). In the national macro context, CSR adoption is also driven by regulatory policies. For example, OJK Regulation No. 51/POJK.03/2017 concerning Sustainable Finance mandates the implementation of social and environmental responsibility in corporate financial reporting. This demonstrates that CSR is not only a moral requirement but also a corporate compliance mechanism in Indonesia, particularly for companies operating in capital-intensive industries or strategic sectors such as energy, mining, and utilities (Sondakh et al., 2025). More specifically, in the electricity supply sector, local companies like PT. Gorontalo Listrik Perdana Tanjung Karang have a dual responsibility: not only to maintain electricity supply and reliability, but also to build social relationships with the communities surrounding their operational areas. In areas like North Gorontalo Regency, where communities are highly dependent on electricity for daily economic activities, perceptions of electricity providers are highly sensitive. Communities expect electricity companies to not only provide technical services but also play a social role, for example through CSR programs that promote village development, education, health, or local infrastructure (Purnaweni et al., 2021).

The urgency of this research becomes even more apparent when considering the major challenges in the field. One challenge is the company's social legitimacy ("social license to operate"). Even if a company has implemented a CSR program, not all communities may perceive it as a tangible benefit. Without positive perceptions, CSR can be seen as merely an "image project," and trust in the company remains low (Wang, 2023). On the other hand, fragile trust can limit the positive image impact of CSR and even lead to public skepticism. In this context, local electricity companies need to understand how the public interprets their CSR programs and how these interpretations affect the level of trust and the company's image in the eyes of the public. National statistics suggest that public awareness of CSR is growing. Indonesians are increasingly demanding transparency and accountability from large corporations, particularly on social and environmental issues. While specific data for PT. Gorontalo Listrik Perdana may not yet be publicly available, this national trend serves as a relevant micro-background for this study. Furthermore, many large corporations' CSR reports now include social and environmental metrics to demonstrate their tangible impact, but these reports do not necessarily translate into positive perceptions among local communities, particularly in rural or remote areas (Mangoni et al., 2024). In previous studies, several studies have explored the relationship between CSR, trust, and corporate image, but most were quantitative and used samples in the financial services or banking industry, not electric utilities. For example, research on Bank Syariah Mandiri showed that CSR had a significant influence on trust and corporate image (Mandiri et al., 2021).

Another study in Indonesia highlighted that the CSR strategy at PT PLN (Persero) in UP3 West Surabaya improved the company's image and community welfare (Silvia & Nirawati, 2024). However, these studies tend to use quantitative methods (e.g., SEM, regression), and do not qualitatively explore how local communities understand and evaluate CSR programs, and how these perceptions relate to trust and image in depth. Another relevant but different contextual study is a study of public mining companies in Indonesia, which used quantitative methods to measure the impact of CSR on local communities (Soelistijo, 2013). However, this approach does not sufficiently highlight the perceptual dimension, namely how people interpret CSR in their daily lives, how trust is built, and how corporate image is formed from their real-life experiences. There is also global literature that shows the link between CSR and corporate image through trust variables, including research that found that information trust moderates the effect of CSR on image. Moreover, in times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, studies suggest that perceptions of CSR motives (e.g., altruistic vs. marketing motives) and CSR authenticity significantly influence community image and behavior, while government intervention may play a role in moderating these effects (Balqiah et al., 2023). These studies describe important aspects, but most are not contextualized to regional electricity companies in Indonesia, especially in a qualitative approach.

Furthermore, this research will also address the limitations of previous studies in terms of depth of social understanding. Quantitative research tends to provide numerical figures, such as the extent of CSR's influence on image, but does not explain the mechanisms of perception: why people trust (or distrust) CSR programs, how they reflect on CSR's contribution to their social lives, and what factors contribute to a positive or negative corporate image in their eyes. Through in-depth interviews and field observations, this research can uncover previously hidden social narratives, providing insights for more effective and sustainable CSR strategies. The theoretical contribution of this research is the development of a conceptual framework of CSR relations, public perception, trust, corporate image in the context of local utilities. This model can serve as an academic reference for CSR studies in local public companies, particularly in the energy sector, and enrich the CSR literature with a qualitative perspective in the local social context. Meanwhile, the practical contribution is very tangible: the research results will assist the management of PT. Gorontalo Listrik Perdana in designing CSR programs that are more relevant, transparent, and have a real social impact, as well as communication strategies that build trust and a positive image in the local community.

Methods

The research method used in this study is a descriptive qualitative approach, which aims to describe in depth the public's perception of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program of PT. Gorontalo Listrik Perdana Tanjung Karang and its influence on trust and corporate image. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand social phenomena based on the public's experiences, views, and interpretations directly in the context of their lives. Descriptive qualitative is also considered most appropriate for exploring

the conceptual relationship between perception, trust, and corporate image that cannot be adequately described only through quantitative measurements (Furidha, 2023).

Informants were selected using purposive sampling, selecting individuals with knowledge, experience, or direct involvement with the company's CSR program. Key informants included beneficiaries of the CSR program, community leaders, village government representatives, and internal company stakeholders involved in the planning and implementation of the CSR program. This study involved 15 informants, consisting of 8 community beneficiaries of the CSR program, 3 community leaders, 2 village government representatives, and 2 internal company parties directly involved in CSR planning and implementation. This number was determined based on the principle of data saturation, which occurs when the information obtained is repetitive and does not produce significant new themes.

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were used to explore community understanding, perceptions, and narratives regarding CSR implementation and its impact on corporate trust and image. Field observations were conducted to directly observe the social dynamics occurring in the community, including the actual conditions at CSR activity locations and interactions between the company and the community. Furthermore, document analysis was conducted on CSR reports, company publications, activity documentation, and local news to obtain an objective picture of the company's CSR programs and policies.

Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman model, which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the data reduction stage, researchers filtered raw data from interviews and observations into information relevant to the research focus. The data presentation stage was carried out by organizing the findings in the form of narratives, categories, and emerging themes. Meanwhile, in the conclusion stage, researchers interpreted the meaning of the data and connected it to the theory of perception, trust, and corporate image. To ensure the credibility of the findings, triangulation of sources and methods, member checking, and discussions with colleagues (peer debriefing) were conducted. With this methodological approach, the research is expected to produce a comprehensive picture of public perception and the social construction of trust and corporate image in the local context of North Gorontalo.

Results and Discussion

During the data analysis phase, a theme emerged that the majority of local residents highly value PT. Gorontalo Listrik Perdana's CSR programs, especially when they address basic needs such as electricity infrastructure and education. Many residents noted that the local electricity company had previously lacked the presence of a "caring neighbor," but through CSR, the company has begun to engage with the community by providing electricity assistance, scholarships, or technical training. This narrative aligns with the research findings of which shows that PLN's CSR program in West Surabaya City (such as the village electricity program) has been proven to improve the company's image and community welfare. Beyond

appreciation, there is also a perception that PT. Gorontalo Listrik Perdana's CSR is more strategic and has ulterior business motives. Several informants expressed skepticism: they view the company's CSR as part of a "branding" effort to gain a positive public image, rather than solely to help the community. This attitude reflects literature findings on CSR, which can be viewed as a marketing tool (greenwashing) if not implemented transparently and authentically. A study by Raci Pitaloka and Budiwitjaksono (2020), for example, found that public perception of CSR implementation in industrial areas can be negative if the CSR program is perceived as unfair or lacking real impact (Jurnal & Mea, 2022).

However, despite some community doubts, interview results indicate that public trust in PT. Gorontalo Listrik Perdana increases along with the consistency of its CSR program. Residents who have long experienced the benefits of CSR described how their trust grows when CSR is delivered concretely: for example, free electricity or subsidized tariffs in certain areas, street lighting donor programs in remote villages, and the company's involvement in local social activities. These findings are consistent with the theory of trust, where concrete actions and good intentions (benevolence) from a company will strengthen public trust (Huber et al., 2014). At the institutional level, the company's CSR documentation demonstrates considerable transparency, for example, quarterly reports on CSR programs to the public through local media and announcements at village halls. This type of transparency is crucial for strengthening integrity within a framework of trust. In CSR literature, transparency and accountability are key to building public trust (Meribe et al., 2021).

Furthermore, narrative analysis shows that CSR also impacts the company's image in the eyes of the public. Many residents stated that PT. Gorontalo Listrik Perdana's image has shifted from being simply an "electricity company" to a "local development partner." They feel the company is not solely focused on profit but also cares about the socio-economic progress of the villages surrounding its coverage area. This aligns with research (Ansar et al., 2023) who found that CSR can significantly improve a company's image in the eyes of the public if the program is relevant to community aspirations. However, some informants stated that this positive image is not universal. Some residents who have not directly benefited from CSR programs believe that the distribution of CSR assistance is unequal. They feel that companies "pick favorite villages" or only focus programs on certain strategic areas. This raises questions about social justice and the perceptions of local elites regarding CSR programs. Similar concerns were expressed in the study of on PT Indocement's CSR, the importance of continuous evaluation of CSR programs so that they can meet the needs of all levels of society fairly. The construction of public perceptions of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as an instrument for sustainable social development illustrates how the public interprets, understands, and assesses corporate CSR programs not merely as a form of short-term social responsibility, but as a strategic effort that has a real impact on improving the quality of life and sustainable community development. This perception is formed through direct community experience of program benefits, such as educational support, infrastructure development, energy access, economic empowerment, and corporate involvement in resolving social issues in the surrounding environment. This research shows that the success of CSR is greatly influenced by transparency, the program's relevance to local needs,

community participation, and consistent long-term implementation. When the public views CSR as an inclusive, fair, and empowerment-oriented program, it will be perceived as an important instrument in promoting social development that aligns with the principles of sustainability, such as reducing inequality, improving welfare, and strengthening community capacity. Conversely, if CSR is perceived merely as a corporate image strategy without real impact, the company's social legitimacy can be weakened. Therefore, the construction of public perception is a key element in determining the extent to which CSR can function as a bridge between corporate interests and sustainable social development goals.

In the discussion of corporate image theory, public perception that a company demonstrates concern through CSR contributes to the formation of a positive image as a "local empowerment institution." This kind of positive image is very important because, according to public relations and image theory, public perception of an organization's values is greatly influenced by concrete actions and consistent communication (Line, 2024).

Further analysis revealed that the CSR communication process between the company and the local community is still suboptimal. Despite transparency in CSR reports, some residents reported that CSR program socialization was insufficient: they did not always receive initial information before the program was launched, leaving many unprepared or unaware of how to participate. This limitation hinders the CSR program's full potential for building trust and image (Tanduklangi, 2023). The community's lack of preparedness for CSR participation reflects the gap between company intentions and the reality on the ground. Residents who are not involved in CSR planning often feel like passive recipients, not active partners. This passive attitude can reduce the effectiveness of CSR as a trust-building and social legitimacy strategy (Salman & Ishak, 2023). In the context of stakeholder theory, these findings indicate that while companies express commitment to local stakeholders, CSR implementation has not been fully integrated with community voices. This illustrates the need for strengthened stakeholder engagement to ensure that CSR truly reflects the needs of local communities, not merely corporate objectives (Nugrahaini, 2022).

Furthermore, interview analysis revealed that there is a tendency for the public to associate CSR with “social risk mitigation measures.” Some residents acknowledged that CSR programs occur at times of social problems, such as electricity supply failures or citizen protests. In their view, such CSR programs are used to rebuild trust and image after conflict, rather than as long-term social investments. This thinking is similar to the concept of reputation as “insurance” against public backlash in reputation literature; a reputation built through CSR can buffer the negative impact of controversial business decisions (Andriosopoulos & Deepty, 2020). An active trust mechanism also emerges through the involvement of community leaders: traditional leaders, youth leaders, and religious leaders stated that companies often use them as bridges for CSR communication. The role of these local leaders is crucial in shaping public perception because they possess social legitimacy and are trusted to represent the voice of the community. The involvement of these local leaders also impacts the company's image because through these figures, CSR programs are perceived as more "sincere" and "understood" by the community. Thus, the company is not simply sending aid, but forging socio-strategic relationships that strengthen its reputation at the

grassroots level (Romadhona et al., 2024). However, there are concerns within the community that companies are using community leaders as "legitimacy tools." Several respondents stated that local leaders are selected because of their political affiliation or easy access, rather than because of broad representation. This process can undermine trust if the community perceives the leaders' involvement as manipulative (Tortosa-Edo & López-Navarro, 2024).

On the other hand, field observations revealed that PT. Gorontalo Listrik Perdana's CSR programs were sometimes episodic and unsustainable. Some community projects lasted only a year or two and then stopped or changed form, leaving the community feeling that "CSR promises" were not always fulfilled in the long term. This inconsistency has the potential to damage the trust that has been built. This unsustainable CSR program aligns with a common criticism in the CSR literature that companies often initiate large social programs as image building but then fail to follow up with long-term commitments (see CSR studies of many large companies). A sustainable CSR model is crucial to ensure that community trust is not fleeting (Mandal, 2025). The findings of this study provide an important contribution to the innovation of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices by demonstrating that CSR effectiveness is no longer sufficiently dependent on conventional patterns of providing short-term social assistance or philanthropy, but needs to be transformed into a CSR model that is participatory, adaptive, and based on the real needs of the community. The main innovation that emerges from these findings is the importance of shifting CSR from a top-down approach to co-creation, where communities are involved from the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages of programs so that CSR becomes more relevant, inclusive, and sustainable. In addition, information transparency, the use of digital communication, and collaboration with local figures and local governments are innovative strategies to strengthen the company's social legitimacy and expand the program's impact. These findings also emphasize that innovative CSR must be able to integrate business objectives with social development through economic empowerment, education, sustainable energy, and community capacity building programs, so that companies not only build a positive image but also create shared value for the community. Thus, this study enriches modern CSR practices by emphasizing that innovation lies in the company's ability to build authentic, responsive, and long-term-oriented social relationships, so that CSR evolves from merely a corporate obligation to a strategic instrument for sustainable social development.

Document analysis indicates that the company's CSR budget is allocated fluctuatingly, depending on the company's financial performance in a given year. This fluctuation is derived from annual CSR reports and local management statements. Unstable allocations may explain why some programs are short-lived and then abandoned. This variability in CSR allocations also impacts community perceptions: residents in villages receiving short-term programs reported being more cautious about accepting company promises, due to past experiences where assistance ceased when the company's economic conditions changed (Troise & Camilleri, 2021). However, some residents continued to argue that despite the inconsistent nature of CSR programs, their short-term presence remains important because they open up a new dialogue between the company and the community. This suggests that while trust may

be shaken if the programs are discontinued, the company's image can still be positively impacted by its initial intentions.

From a theoretical perspective, this phenomenon reflects the importance of institutional and relational trust. Public trust stems not only from the altruistic actions of companies, but also from social institutions (such as local leaders) and long-term relationships. Trust theory suggests that trust is built interactively and contextually, not simply through one-way actions (Gibson, 2022). Furthermore, the results of this study indicate that corporate image is shaped not only by the objective benefits of CSR (e.g., infrastructure), but also by the social narrative created through interactions, symbols, and communication. Corporate image becomes a "social image" constructed through dialogue and everyday experiences in society. Within a strategic CSR framework, these findings underscore that effective CSR for enhancing image and trust is not just about giving, but about telling the story of how the company conveys its intentions, how society responds, and how both parties build a shared understanding (Li et al., 2023). Ultimately, the analysis concludes that PT. Gorontalo Listrik Perdana's CSR program has made a real contribution to the company's trust and image, but this success is still conditioned by aspects of program distribution, transparency of fund allocation, and involvement of local communities as true partners.(Ramadhita & Halilah, 2015)Practically, these findings suggest that companies strengthen their CSR communication strategies, improve participatory mechanisms in CSR planning with communities, and ensure program sustainability to prevent trust from becoming temporary. Theoretically, this study enriches the CSR literature with a qualitative model that emphasizes the interrelationship between local community perceptions, trust, and corporate image in the context of a local electric utility. This model can serve as a reference for CSR research in similar companies in other regions in Indonesia. Thus, this study demonstrates that CSR is not merely a marketing tool, but a strategic instrument for building social trust and a positive image when implemented in a participatory, transparent, and sustainable manner (Vlastelica et al., 2018).

Conclusion and Recommendation

The implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) by PT. Gorontalo Listrik Perdana Tanjung Karang is closely related to the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), because through electricity assistance programs, energy infrastructure development, and community empowerment, the company not only increases community access to adequate energy, but also encourages inclusive socio-economic development in the North Gorontalo region. Sustainable, transparent, and community-based CSR programs contribute to improving the quality of life, reducing development gaps, and strengthening partnerships between the private sector and local communities, thus aligning with the SDGs vision of creating equitable, sustainable, and prosperity-oriented development.

This study shows that PT. Gorontalo Listrik Perdana Tanjung Karang's CSR program has a significant influence on the formation of positive public perceptions, particularly in increasing trust and the company's image. The community believes that CSR programs relevant to basic needs—such as electricity assistance, education, and social activities—can

strengthen the company's legitimacy and social closeness with the local community. However, this positive perception is not evenly distributed because some residents still see inconsistencies in implementation, program distribution that is not fully inclusive, and limited communication and public participation in CSR planning. These factors are the main determinants of the dynamics of trust and company image, so the quality of CSR is largely determined by sustainability, transparency, and the level of community involvement.

Companies need to strengthen their CSR strategies by increasing program sustainability, expanding the reach of beneficiaries, and designing community-based planning schemes to ensure that each CSR activity truly meets the needs of local communities. Furthermore, transparency in budget allocations and more intensive information dissemination need to be improved to ensure the public has a clear understanding of the objectives, processes, and impacts of CSR programs. It is also crucial for companies to forge stronger partnerships with local governments, community leaders, and local organizations to ensure that CSR functions as an instrument of collective development, rather than merely a symbolic activity. With a more inclusive and sustainable strategy, CSR not only enhances trust and corporate image but also contributes to broader regional socio-economic development.

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